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ABSTRACT

Results are reported of a 2-year study in the Chesapeake (Virginia) public schools to determine the degree of participation in "Black History Month" and the type of black awareness courses offered within individual schools. Thirty-six school principals were asked to respond to the following questions: (1) Does your school observe African American History month? (2) Are any courses taught in your school on the African American experience? (3) Have you sponsored any other activities observing the contributions of African Americans? Less than 50 percent of the principals responded. The respondents reported that observances of the African American experience took place during Black Awareness Month and that the percentage of black faculty and student population in the schools had no effect on the frequency of observances. In addition, none of the responding schools offered courses on the black experience and only one respondent reported any other activities observing contributions of African Americans. The report concludes that the resolution by the Chesapeake Board of Education designating "Black History Month" had a negligible impact on increasing observances from the first year to the second. Further, it is concluded that the Board of Education, Superintendent's office, and school principals have not encouraged the observance of Black History Month. (KC)

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THE FREQUENCY AND TYPES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION PROGRAMS IN THE CHESAPEAKE SCHOOL SYSTEM BETWEEN 1980 - 1982

by
Dr.E.Curtis Alexander

THE STUDY. The observance of African American history month celebrations in the Chesapeake public school system recently came into foucs. The Chesapeake Board acting on a recommendation from the Superintendent of Schools, issued a proclamation citing February, as "Black History Month" in the school system. There was a major concern that the contributions of the African American was not being adequately observed during the month of February when "Black History Month" is observed nationally.

This research study was designed to collect data on the inclusion and observances of the African American experience in the Chesapeake School System. At present, there exists a paucity of data on the frequency and types of observances during African American history month in particular and throughout the academic school year. Therefore, this research project will use the collected data to suggest ways in which the school system could improve its present program to optimize the pedagogical opportunities and learning experiences of its African American student population. Thereby, as a result of this study, the learning potential of all of the students in the Chesapeake School System will hopefully be greatly enhanced.

Dr. E. Curtis Alexander, the principal researcher for this study is a Clinical Educational Urbanologist Specializing in the development of educational programming for African and African American children and their parents.

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This study examined the frequency and type of African American history month celebration programs in the Chesapeake School System between the years 1980 - 1982. In addition, this study sought to examine the degree and type of courses being offered and those that included at least a unit of study or more on the African American experience; and their plans to observe the contributions of African Americans throughout the school year. Three basic questions were addressed:

1. Are any courses taught in your school on the African American Experience (history, music, art, etc.)? If yes, name the courses and grade levels of students enrolled and name of textbook used...., what courses include at least a unit on the African American Experience?

2. Does your school observe African American History Month Celebration? If...Yes...,how many days during African American History Month were observed? Also, please attach a copy of your program schedule.

3. Did you sponsor or do you plan any other activities during the 1980 - 81..., 1981 - 1982 academic school year observing the contributions of African Americans? Please attach a copy of your program activities schedule.

Analyses reported here represent an update of a previous unpublished research study (conducted in 1979 by ECA Associates) and are based on a more extensive questionnaire than the informal inquiry used in the earlier study. The data of African - American history month celebrations programs in 1980 - 1982 were used for this study. According to Mr. Zack Quidley, the liason for the

Chesapeake School System for this research project, thirty - six (36) questionnaires were sent out to the school principals from this office during the first week in February of this year (1982). Less than 50% of the school principals returned the questionnaire either incompleted or completed. The majority of the respondents for this survey were clustered around the K - 4, K - 6 and intermediate school levels. Although the data collected for this study does not represent responses from all of the Chesapeake Schools, this study does purport to scientifically analyze the data made available to us by the liason from the Superintendent's office. The collected data was seen as a representative sampling for the Chesapeake Public School System.

RESULTS. The population percentages of African - American faculty ranged from 20% to 25% and the percentages of African American students ranged from 24% to 40% in the respondent schools. There was no significant correlation in the frequency of celebrations between the schools with different percentages of African American faculty and student populations. The correlations between African American and non - African American faculty and African American student and non - African American student populations were examined. In neither analysis was the difference between the two groups statistically significant. We conclude that the percentage of African American faculty and student populations in the schools do not markedly increase or decrease the frequency of African American history month celebrations in the Chesapeake public schools.

The results of the analysis of the data concerning the course offerings, textbooks used and students enrolled in courses on the African American Experience showed that none of the schools offered courses on the African American Experience. We concluded that there is no marked difference in the offering of courses on the African American Experience based on the variegated percentages of African American faculty and student populations in the Chesapeake schools. In fact, the schools with "negro" principals were unanimous in their failure to return the completed or even incompleted questionaires. Ironically, if the schools with white principals had not responded this research study would not have been possible.

The results of the analysis of the data concerning the observance of African American history month celebrations, the number of days observed and a copy of the program schedule were examined. Each respondent reported observances during the entire month of February. The type of programs sponsored included (1) speakers (2) bullentin board displays (3) student read essays over the PA system and (4) contests. We conclude that the African American History Month Celebrations were not systematically or programmatically planned throughout each school and throughout the school system. None of the respondents attached the requested copy of their program activities.

The results of the analysis of the data concerning the sponsorship or planning of other activities observing the contributions of African Americans and a copy of the program schedule were examined. The majority of the respondents reported that they did not plan or had sponsored any other activities during the 1981 - 1982 academic school year observing the contributions of African Americans. One respondent reported the observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day in their school. We conclude

that the observance of the contributions of African Americans, other than the February observances are not on the educational agenda in the Chesapeake Public School System. The respondent that reported the sponsorship of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day observance did not attach a copy of their school's program.

However, the analysis of the comparison on the frequency and type of African American history month celebrations in the Chesapeake public school system for the academic years of 1980 - 81 and 1981 - 82 do not differ markedly in their observances celebrating the contributions of African Americans in American society.

CONCLUSIONS. The study examined the frequency and type of African American History Celebration Programs in the Chesapeake School System between the years 1980-82. On February 24, 1982, the Superintendent of Schools wrote the following article in the Chesapeake Post newspaper that was a response to our research inquiry made to his office in September of 1982. The article was entitled BLACK HISTORY MONTH:

> During its regular January meeting, the Chesapeake School Board adopted a resolution designating February as Black History Month in the Chesapeake Public Schools.
>
> The resolution, which recognized the fact that this month is celebrated the same way in many institutions around the country, urged that activities be conducted in the city schools to recognize the role of Black Americans in the shaping of American History.
>
> Accordingly, during this past month, teachers have been emphasizing lessons that highlight the important aspect of our history. They have obtained numerous materials and have conducted a number of activities, including PTA programs.
>
> This month of special emphasis is important not only for Black youngsters but for all yourgsters. Up until recently it was difficult to find references in our textbooks to the role of Black Americans in our history. Only in the past decade have textbooks been available to us that highlight these important contributions.
>
> A good education is one that includes an understanding of the heritage that belongs to us all. The celebration of February as Black History Month in cur public schools is one small attempt in accomplishing such an understanding.

This study showed that the resolution by the Board of Education designating "Black History Month" in the Chesapeake Public School System has had a negligible impact on increasing the actual observances in the schools. In fact, there were no signs of any leadership offered at the central administration level to actually provide programmatic leadership to the schools.

The academic years of 1980 - 81 and 1981 - 82 were separately compared and no significant difference between the years was found in the frequency and types of observances. It was concluded that the frequency and type of Black History Month observances before the "Resoultion" and after the resolution have been celebrated in an abysmally antipathetic manner in the Chesapeake Public School System. In fact, the African American students received less information on the contributions of their ancestors to American society, than their parents and grandparents received under a heinous system of "Separate and unequal" education - that celebrated "Negro History Week" for one (1) week in February rather than the present one (1) month celebration.

To the degree that generalization is appropriate, several implications may be drawn from this conclusion. The absence of course offerings and even units of study in courses presently being offered on the African American Experience seriously inhibits and to a great extent "prohibits" the optimization of learning experiences of African American Students in the schools. The lack of a systematic quantitative and qualitative programmatic plan for the observances of "Black History Month" by the Board of Education, Superintendent's office and school principals have through their "inaction" - undermined the "Black History Month" celebration in the public schools. In fact, their shared "mis-leadership", has contributed to the minimization of peda-

gogical opportunities of African American students in the public schools. The almost unanimous programmatic consensus on the part of public schools to ignore to say the least, the observing of the contributions of African Americans during the academic year [except February] is a gross example of "ethnic exculsivism." This dubious consensus raises the question as to whether the schools denies African American students "Due Process under the Law"- in the areas of curriculum parity; equal educational opportunities; methodological inequities; material bigotry; and bias evaluation instruments and examinations.

Finally, an increase in the frequency and type of African American history month celebration programs in the Chesapeake school system is not to be seen as a probable panacea to alleviate the myriad of problems confronted by African American students in particular and all students in general. Celebrating African American history month programs should never be seen as an end in itself, but as a step in the students continuing life - long quest for an education that prepares a student to not only learn how to make a living - but more importantly, to learn how to live in the world as a "human being." Through African American history month celebrations in the schools, the students can develop a more relevant historical understanding of each other in an environ that disseminates knowledge based on a dominate American value that espouses - "the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God." Further, those students in turn will develop a genuine understanding and a high - level of tolerance for the particularisms of race, religion, sex, national origin, creed and the variant proclivities endemic to people of the myriad of socio - economic and political groupings, in not only American society, but throughout

the world. The Chesapeake public school system has a responsibility to help African American students in particular and all students in general -in an enviornment by systematically and programmatically offering courses; and celebrating the contributions of African Americans by integrating the curriculum offerings, not only during African American history month - but throughout the entire school year. In fact, the Chesapeake School System should help all students to realize their "human and intellectual skills" by helping them make decisions about the next step in the life - long educational process by answering this question in a non - sectarian manner - "WHO IS MY BROTHER?"

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